

Beyond the Atlantic Roar

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Reviews/Revue

Beyond the Atlantic Roar

Whatever the merits or demerits of this book* may be, it should for at least one reason be welcome. Commencing with Brebner's first volume in 1927 an altogether disproportionate amount of writing has been given to the well-worn themes of Nova Scotian history, to the Acadians, the New England Planters and to the preeminence of Halifax and its politics. In recent years a sprinkling of younger historians have imparted something of the evangelical enthusiasms of Henry Alline and his contemporaries to the exercise of their craft. It is remarkable that comparatively little attention has been given to the eastern side of the province, to the heritage, if the religious ingredient be preferred, of Bishops McEachern and Fraser and of the Reverends MacGregor and McCulloch. The Scots came late and so have their historians.

This volume gives scant and cursory reference to eminent individuals. The names of Abraham Cuyler, David Mathews, Rana Cossitt and others who played a part in the lamentable history of early Cape Breton are not to be found in the index. This is because the book is proclaimed to be "in the vanguard of a new wave of writing on ethnic studies." History and sociology combine to describe a character, probably one of the most distinctive in Canada, that has been imparted to Cape Breton and the eastern part of the Nova Scotian peninsula, one that has become "fused" with Anglo-Saxondom but never entirely "harmonized."

Detail is rather overpowering. The four counties settled by very predominantly Scottish populations, Pictou, Antigonish, Inverness and Victoria, are dealt with separately. Remote and little known communities occasionally receive elaborate explanation. Those who visit the region can, by the use of this book, find something to contemplate other than scenery, the names and origins of the pioneers who established rude homesteads on soil that was sometimes tolerable but seldom fertile, the whimsicalities and superstitions of a folk-culture that can still be encountered in some of the rural areas. Some will be disappointed to discover that Scots who settled in Richmond and Cape Breton Counties receive no attention at all. Historians are entitled to ask what became of the large contingent of Loyalist Scots from the south who were pitched on the shores of eastern Nova Scotia following the American Revolution, Miss Gilroy's list of grantees of the old county of Sydney (*PANS Report*, 1937) shows a high proportion of Scottish names. Except for the soldiers of the Eighty-Fourth Regiment identity seems completely to have disappeared. Admittedly such a query could produce an immense amount of investigation without producing positive conclusion.

* D. Campbell and R. A. MacLean. *Beyond the Atlantic Roar; A Study of and Nova Scotia Scots*. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1974.

Quite frequently the authors strike notes of pessimism on the possibilities of survival of the remnants of Gaelic speech and other manifestations of Scottish lore. While "ethnicity" is such a good word in Canada, while the Ukrainians, Italians and other comparatively recent arrivals sustain the song and story of their homelands, many will hope that what is probably the most notable Scottish enclave in the country will not see its character totally eroded. Yet all of the evidence, statistical and otherwise, on emigration, industrialization, urbanization, must force readers to share the fears of the authors. A rather ominous and rueful remark is that Nova Scotian Scots are much less prominent in contemporary education than were their forefathers at a time when literacy was an ambition and schooling a triumph.

Countless books have been written about the Scots at home and abroad and of their national characteristics which have given them a redoubtable reputation throughout the world. It may be argued that *Beyond the Atlantic Roar* shows nothing new of their sturdiness and tenacity, their submission to hardships and their love of home. Yet much of the detail is highly novel. The perspective is a local one but nothing is lost in national stature. To a great degree oral history can be suspect but, without lowering the brightness of their narrative, the authors are critical and cautious. A trifle of the maudlin, of which Scots throughout the world are seldom ashamed, sharpens the tone. Much of what has until now been the province of romantic *raconteurs*, of obscure bards, fiddlers and balladeers can, so far as a book permits, be shared by all who take more than a passing interest in eastern Nova Scotia.

Within its limits the book has an encyclopaedic quality and is much more than a character study of a unique community. It carries us to contemporary times and, like a great deal of other Maritime history, sounds chords of melancholy and disquiet. The impact of North American expansionism has replaced a society that not much more than a century ago could be described as primitive with a mosaic of the ungainly modern and the picturesque traditional. The exceptionally rapid growth of Sydney and its satellite towns at the turn of the century was merely one of the factors inducing change. Rural depopulation and exodus to the United States coincided with the development of coal-mining and the steel industry so that even in the prosperous years of the so-called Laurier era the pervading feeling was one of being bypassed.

Many pages of statistics tell the story in detail. Except, perhaps, for writers of other books they can become wearisome and seem contradictory to the more literary purposes of a well written book. The humane does not blend naturally with the pseudo-scientific. Within a comparatively narrow compass the authors have added a chapter of forty-four pages on political behaviour, a concession to the specialist in a volume that in many parts can be a delight to casual readers. A cruel critic, though admitting immense value in the book, might describe it as something of a mishmash. Rather like the theologians of

the middle ages, our sociologists persistently seek the keys of the kingdom. It is presumably Mr. Campbell who abandons his light touch and interrupts some lively description with precepts from sociological texts that seem extraneous and unnecessary. As much as any other study that of the Nova Scotian Scots does not fall into easily defined blueprints and patterns.

The bibliography is impressive. Of all the regions of the Maritime Provinces it is perhaps eastern Nova Scotia that has been least served by literature. There is a surprisingly large number of minor printed works that have seldom, if ever been employed for the purposes of a book such as this.

W. S. MacNUTT

Local History in Atlantic Canada

In 1969 George Rawlyk predicted a new "Golden Age in Maritime Historiography"¹ and much of what he anticipated has appeared. *Acadiensis*, revived in the tradition of the first prolific period in Maritime historiography,² is in its fifth year of publication. Each year several doctoral dissertations on Atlantic Canada are read, popular magazines carry articles on the history of Atlantic Canada,³ and newspapers⁴ feature the history of the region. The impact of the renewed interest in the Atlantic Provinces by scholars and journalists has had manifestations throughout the region.

The outburst of energy exhibited by Canadians in 1967, when wedded with this renewed interest in history, prompted the creation of numerous local museums and the restoration of several historic sites. Most of these museums have not faltered; moreover, many are firmly established institutions that cannot begin to adequately display the artifacts donated by local residents.⁵ In urban areas where museums existed for years other organizations are active in the promotion of an awareness of local history. Heritage Trust organizations in Saint John, Fredericton, Halifax and St. John's carried out sophisticated campaigns to encourage preservation and restoration of buildings of architectural significance and have chastened developers and govern-

1 George Rawlyk "A New Golden Age of Maritime Historiography" *Queens Quarterly*, 76 (1969), pp. 55-65.

2 P. B. Buckner, editor, *Acadiensis*, Volume 1, No. 1 (1971), pp. 3-9.

3 *The Atlantic Advocate* has made the history of the region an integral part of its format.

4 The Saint John Evening *Times-Globe* and the *Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton) have each carried lengthy series and occasional features on local history.

5 The Queens Co. Museum, Kings Co. Museum, Musee Acadien, Keillor House and Penitentiary Museum are New Brunswick examples of this Canadian Trend.